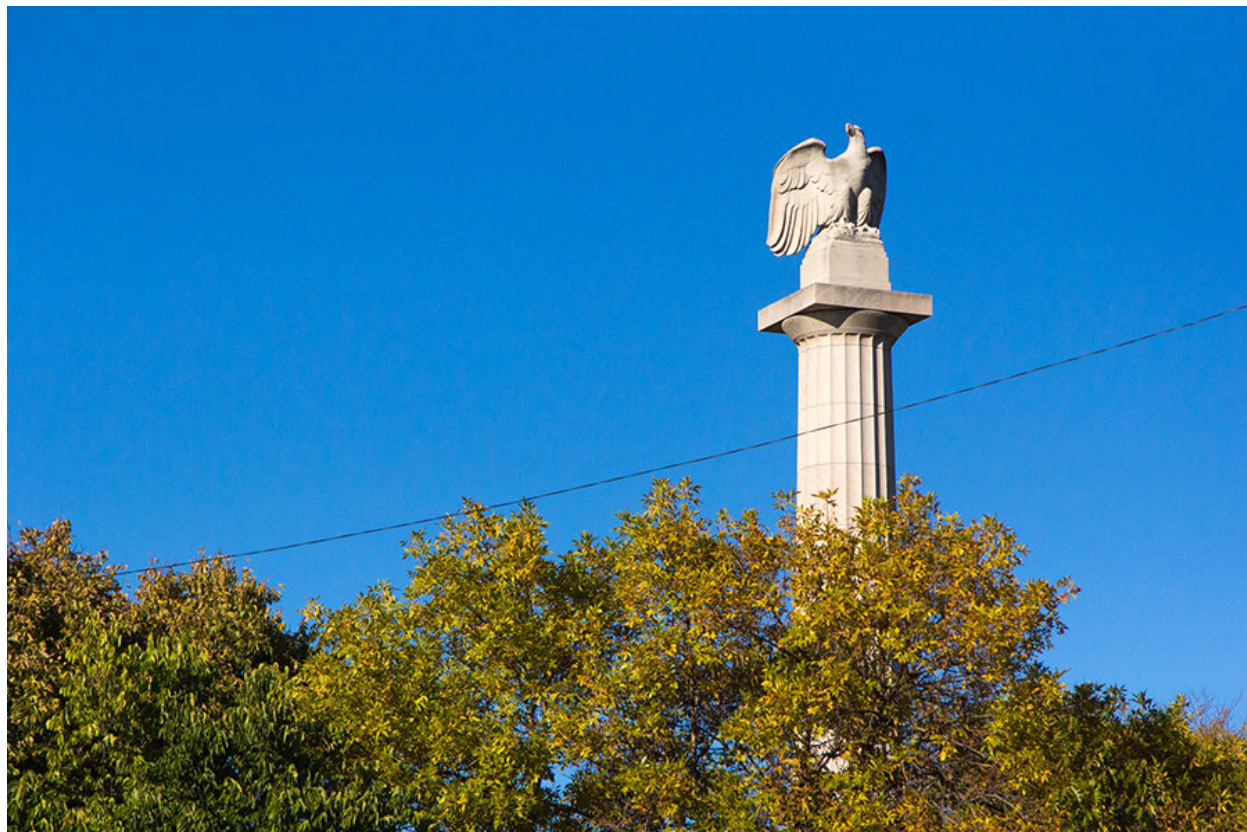


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Refugees of Logan Square

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Logan Square's history includes many refugees, who made their marks on the neighborhood, even as it changes today.

"Neighborhoods reinvent themselves as people change over time," said Dan Pogorzelski, a writer and editor for Forgotten Chicago, an organization that shares the history of Chicago. Refugees in Logan Square are a huge part of that ongoing history. "They leave a legacy in terms of the built environment, they leave their legacy in terms of the lives they build — inside and out of the neighborhoods — and the legacy they leave behind."

June 20 marks World Refugee Day, which marks a day to honor those who were "forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence," according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

“There might not be profound knowledge today of the history that refugees left behind in Logan Square, which is why it’s important to bring this up and to remind people of the significance that Logan Square had as a true oasis as a place where people were able to find their footing and to then rebuild their lives,” Pogorzelski said.

Logan Square’s refugee population began growing in the 1890s when Polish immigrants fled a deep recession and poverty. A second wave of Polish refugees came after WWII, after surviving Nazi concentration camps. Cuban families sought refuge here in the 1960s after Fidel Castro came to power.

The strong presence of churches are part of what drew the Cuban population to Chicago, said Pogorzelski, “The Roman Catholic church was such a strong, prominent part in the Cuban community. Having come to that area of Logan Square, that institution was key in attracting the Cuban community to Logan Square, as for many other Latino communities across Chicago.”

The existing Polish population in Logan Square is what brought the Guzowski family here. It was after WWII when John Guzowski, a published author and poet, moved to Chicago as a boy. His parents met while in Buchenwald, a concentration camp, and they had John while in a displaced persons camp in Vienenburg, Germany, in 1948. When looking for places to go after the war, “people didn’t want to go back,” Guzowski said. “They said, ‘anyplace but home.’ ”

When considering where to live, Guzowski said refugees were offered transportation to Australia or Argentina, but his mother thought those countries would be too warm for her liking. Her father had lived in New York for 10 years in the early 1900s, and his stories indicated it would be a great place to live.

The Guzowski family moved to Buffalo, New York in 1961 and worked on a farm for a year to pay for their passage. After John’s father corresponded with a friend he had from Buchenwald, he learned of Chicago’s strong Polish community in the Logan Square area, where there were Polish newspapers, Polish schools, bakeries, butchers, etc. “They didn’t want to go back to Poland, but they wanted to still be Polish to a large extent and still experience the culture of Poland,” Guzowski said of his parents. “They never regretted coming to Chicago.”

The family moved around Logan Square and Humboldt Park, saving money from their factory jobs and improving their living situation with each move, from a house with four refugee families, to three, to eventually owning their own apartment on the east side of Humboldt Park. Guzowski said he fondly remembers spending time in the local parks with friends and going to movies at the Congress and Logan Theatres.

It goes without saying, but fifty years ago, the neighborhood was far different than today. “It was kind of rough,” Guzowski said. “I personally felt that there was a certain kind of antagonism for being a refugee.” Being called names pushed Guzowski to avoid addressing his Polish heritage, even as his parents urged him to attend Polish school on Saturdays for lessons in reading and writing in Polish and learning about his ancestor’s history. “I didn’t want anything to do with that.” After moving away for graduate school and growing older — now living in Virginia — he then explored his family’s culture and his experiences as a refugee.

Not all had the experiences he recalls, though, and he learned after writing *Growing Up Polish American* that one friend had the opposite experience and embraced their culture; his friend

went on to make a career in teaching Polish in Chicago schools and becoming director of the Polish Museum of America, Guzowski said.

Different people lived different experiences, and the neighborhood housed many different cultures. "People ought to know that there were refugees there, and they weren't just Polish refugees," Guzowski said, adding that he knew Greek and Ukrainian refugees, as well as many other groups from around the world. "The one common link to all of us was that we were all in Chicago because we had nothing and were looking for something. We were looking for a home, we were looking for a livelihood, we were looking for someplace for our families to live."

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